

CENTRAL BUSINESS IMPROVEMENT DISTRICT
FORT SMITH, ARKANSAS

Tuesday, November 20, 2018
Area Agency on Aging building, 524 Garrison Avenue
Fort Smith, Arkansas
7th Floor Board Room

Meeting Minutes

The Fort Smith Central Business Improvement District Commission's regular meeting was scheduled for 9:30 a.m. on Tuesday, November 20, 2018 in the 7th floor board room of the Area Agency on Aging building, 524 Garrison Avenue, Fort Smith, Arkansas.

The meeting was called to order by Mr. Bill Hanna, Chairperson, at 9:30 a.m. and a quorum was noted present. Also in attendance were commissioners Steve Clark, Lee Ann Vick, Richard Griffin, Phil White, Sam Sicard and Jeff Pryor. Commissioner Rodney Ghan was absent and excused by unanimous vote. Others in attendance included Brenda Andrews, Doug Reinert and Jeff Dingman of the City of Fort Smith.

The minutes of the October 16, 2018 regular meeting were unanimously approved.

Mr. Sicard reviewed the Treasurer's report for the month of October 2018, such documents being previously provided by Mr. Sicard for the commissioners' review. As of October 31, 2018, the Total Cash-on-Hand for the CBID amounted to \$60,333.42. Restricted funds comprise \$3,150.00 of the total cash. The total cash net of restricted funds is \$57,183.42. Mr. Sicard noted specific disbursements of \$20,000 to assist funding with the downtown traffic study and \$15,000 to the Gateway Park project, both previously approved by the Commission. Mr. Pryor moved approval of the Treasurer's report. Mr. White seconded, and the motion carried by unanimous vote.

Talicia Richardson, Executive Director of 64.6 Downtown. provided an update on 64.6 Downtown's activities. Mrs. Richardson recapped the Invest Fort Smith event sponsored by 64.6 Downtown on October 30, which was a great success. There were 125 attendees at the event, who were surveyed after and provided positive feedback. Four different businesses have been in contact with 6.46 as a result of the event inquiring about moving or expanding their business to downtown Fort Smith. The event will be repeated in the future, with expanded topics and perhaps keynote speakers on topics relevant to downtown development or re-development. Mr. Clark asked about the event covering its costs, which Mrs. Richardson reported that it did cover costs of the event and lunch with the \$25 ticket price. Mr. Sicard added that keynote speakers could be supported with appropriate ticket prices as well. Mr. Griffin offered that the city staff and Board of Directors should be encouraged to attend future events. Mrs. Richardson noted that data for October's Unexpected and Outlier projects was still being compiled into a report that will be shared later.

The City of Fort Smith's projects of the Downtown Traffic Study and Form Based Code implementation are ongoing. Ms. Reese Brewer of the Frontier MPO reported that the contract with Halff & Associates was approved by the city, and that Halff will proceed with preparing for data collection as it plans to start taking traffic counts in January, after the holidays. Mr. Griffin inquired as to the timeline for completion and how it might be impacted by waiting until January to take traffic counts. Ms. Brewer and Mr. Dingman replied that contract provides for a nine-month project from the time the agreement was made, not from the time traffic counts were collected. Mr. White was adamant that the city be diligent in holding the consultant to the time frame provided in the contract for services.

Regarding the Form Based Code project, Mrs. Andrews reported that the consultant has provided the draft document for staff to review. Staff has been able to respond to the first few chapters with suggested edits

and will continue to provide comments on the remaining chapters as the consultant compiles the final draft. Staff is particularly reviewing the different and distinct character areas defined within the CBID boundaries and suggesting ways to address the needs of each area. The work is technical and time consuming, but the process should be complete in January/February of 2019 and then proceed through the city's adoption process. Mrs. Richardson added that one of the speakers at the Invest Fort Smith forum has worked with Form Based Code implementation in another city and offered to assist staff with review and input to the process.

Mrs. Richardson reported that 64.6 Downtown is working with the Downtown Business Association to sponsor this year's Shop Small/Shop Local campaign and promote Small Business Saturday, happening this Saturday, November 24. Heather Sanders, president of the Downtown Business Association added that there will be a tree lighting ceremony and event in Pendergraft Park from 5pm to 8pm. Ms. Sanders also offered that the DBA will sponsor Santa Claus in Pendergraft Park each Saturday through the Christmas holiday from noon to 3:30 p.m. each day, and that the DBA will be hosting a New Year's Eve Ball Drop event downtown for the public to come and enjoy.

Mr. Hanna reported on the work session for the CBID facilitated by Mrs. Richardson on November 8. Many topics were discussed, and a top takeaway is that the CBID would like to host a Town Hall meeting and invite the downtown merchants, property owners, and the general public to solicit feedback about what sorts of things those who are invested in downtown would like to see happen in downtown. The CBID has its own list of possible projects but recognized the need to see how that list aligns with what the community wants to see, while considering how projects would be funded. No specific date or other details have been determined, but the CBID offered that they'd like to see it happen by early February. Mrs. Richardson added that such a meeting would help further define the CBID's short-term goals, one of which will be a discussion with the Fort Smith Chief of Police and City Administrator about police patrols at the December CBID meeting.

Mr. Dingman noted that the Neighborhood Services Report, Business License report, and Building Permit report were included in the CBID packet. In response to feedback from the CBID's work session discussion, the Development Department staff is looking at how to best revise the information provided in the Neighborhood Services report. To that end, dates for next inspection have been added to the report. Mr. Sicard asked if start dates could also be included. Mr. Dingman further noted that the department will be looking at its property maintenance code enforcement policies and procedures as applied to the entire city, trying to streamline the processes to get items to the court system as expeditiously as possible, with appropriate follow-up thereafter. The department recognizes that more active enforcement and better reporting and follow-up are the desired result.

Mr. Griffin noted that there are various temporary signs in place at different businesses within the CBID that are almost certainly violations of the sign ordinance, and commented that more active and consistent enforcement is needed.

Doug Reinert, Director of Parks & Recreation, presented an update on the department's activities within the CBID. All of the city's irrigation systems and splash pads have been winterized for the season, and the staff continues to focus on the installation of the holiday lights in Creekmore Park and the downtown areas. The bike/skate park is finished, it had a great Grand Opening event and is being consistently utilized. Mr. Hanna asked about the downtown benches, to which Mr. Reinert replied that staff is waiting on the parts for the additional armrests and will install them and replace the benches when they arrive, which should be in the next couple of weeks. Mr. White asked if the shade awnings at the downtown splash pad will be removed for the winter, Mr. Reinert replied that they will be removed but staff has not gotten to them yet. Mr. Griffin expressed his appreciation for the Parks Department staff and their efforts regarding the holiday lights, noting that it is a big task, but the result looks great and is appreciated by many.

Mr. Sicard asked about the status of the property being purchased from Kansas City Southern Railroad, to which Mr. Reinert replied that the item is on the Board of Directors' November 20 agenda for approval (this

evening). Mr. Sicard further asked what role the Parks Department will have for the property once it is purchased, to which Mr. Reinert replied that the Parks Department will have oversight of any proposals for developing recreation areas on the property. Mr. Hanna added that there is a substantial number of volunteers ready to go to work on the property to make it accessible to the public and provide trails for public use, under oversight of the Parks Department but using minimal city resources.

Mr. White asked that the CBID and all in attendance take a moment to remember Bill Neumeier and his family upon Mr. Neumeier's untimely passing, and further recognize Mr. Neumeier's prior and ongoing contributions to downtown Fort Smith. Mr. Griffin echoed the sentiment, remarking that Mr. Neumeier was a "remarkable guy and a great citizen" of Fort Smith who was one of the early pioneers of the resurgence of downtown.

Mrs. Vick asked Mr. White about the status of the project on the 900 block of Garrison Avenue. Mr. White replied that he and his partners remain committed to the project. Petree Construction is currently on site and will have people on-site from now until the project is completed. He expects twelve residential units to be completed and ready for leasing in the spring. The twelve units will have several communal spaces and amenities on the property that should make them attractive to lease. They are not yet being marketed for lease, but Mr. Ghan is putting together a plan for that approach now. The commercial spaces will be ready after the residential spaces are finished, possibly in the summer of 2019.

Mr. Hanna introduced a request from the property owner of 601 Garrison to demolish the buildings on the property. Mr. George Catsavis, representing the trust that owns the property, indicated that the trust would like to remove the buildings on the property, undercut the lot and install topsoil and sod for the time being as other development options are explored. He has a demolition contractor lined up and would like to get the buildings down by the end of the year. There are a few ideas being explored for the property, including expanding the parking lot that currently exists at the front of the property, and Mr. Catsavis acknowledged that the final plan for the property would be presented to the CBID. Mr. White noted that sometimes temporary plans last longer than expected, and he would like to see a plan for landscaping that complies with the downtown streetscape requirements instead of merely a sodded greenspace. Mr. Clark moved approval of the demolition request with the understanding that Mr. Catsavis will provide staff with a minimal landscaping plan to include trees or other plantings consistent with the streetscape plan for the temporary duration of the greenspace. Mr. White seconded, and Mr. Catsavis was agreeable to the condition. The motion carried by unanimous vote.

Mr. Griffin commented that such requests for building demolitions should be accompanied by distinct landscaping plans for the CBID to review as it considers the demolition requests, so that it is clear to all parties what is intended and approved, even if the landscaping is to be of a temporary nature.

Mr. Hanna relayed that he recently had the opportunity to visit three towns in Germany, all of whom appear to be focused on sustainability and the use of renewable energy, addressing climate change affirmatively in a way he'd like to see Fort Smith emulate.

The next meeting of the CBID Commission is scheduled for December 18. There being no additional business before the Commission, the meeting adjourned at approximately 10:15 a.m.

Respectfully submitted,



Jeff Dingman
Deputy City Administrator